

Athletes Can End Every Game With A Smile If They Wear Mouth Guards

As the weather heats up, kids head to the athletic field. Whatever their sport, one of their most important pieces of equipment is the mouth protector.

Mouth protectors, or mouth guards, are designed to protect the athlete's teeth, lips, cheeks and tongue during sports. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (<http://www.aapd.org/>) recommends that children wear mouth guards whenever they participate in activities with a risk of falls or of head contact with other players or equipment. These include football, baseball, basketball, soccer, hockey, skateboarding and gymnastics.

Dental injuries are the most common type of orofacial injury sustained during participation in sports, according to the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation (<http://www.nyssf.org/>). The NYSSF reports that children, high-school athletes and college athletes will have more than five million teeth knocked out in sporting activities this year. A properly fitted mouth guard could prevent many of these injuries.

Here are some statistics, according to the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (<http://www.aaoms.org/>):

- In football, where mouth guards are required, less than one percent of injuries involve teeth and the oral cavity.
- In basketball, where mouth guards are not required, nearly 35% of injuries involves teeth and the oral cavity.
- Just seven percent of school-age children wear mouth guards, and nearly 4,000 players are treated by doctors annually.

The AAOMS says there are three types of mouth guards:

- Ready made, or stock, mouth guard - the least expensive, available at most sporting goods stores.
- "Boil-and-bite" mouth guard - a mouth-formed device, which is boiled in water by a dental professional. Once cooled, the mouth guard is placed in the user's mouth to shape.
- Custom-made mouth guard - made by the dentist to fit the athlete's mouth.



Stock Guard



Boil & Bite



Custom Guard

The American Dental Association (<http://www.ada.org/>) recommends the following procedures for caring for a mouth guard:

- Rinse with cold water before and after each use.
- Occasionally clean the mouth guard in cool, soapy water and rinse thoroughly.

- Place the mouth guard in a firm, perforated container to store or transport it. This permits air circulation and helps prevent damage.
- To avoid distortion, avoid high temperature, such as hot water, hot surfaces, or direct sunlight.
- If the mouth guard has holes or tears, or becomes loose, replace it.

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